

Good morning, CONGRESSMAN CONYERS and OTHER ESTEEMED MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE : My name is Richard Hersh. I am a 59 year-old male with a painful neurological condition that severely limits my physical abilities. I have traveled from Florida to Washington to advise you of the enormous amount of surveillance and disruption of peaceful groups by agents of the Bush Administration.

In November of 2004, people who represented an association of religious, educational, environmental, peace and social justice activists met at the Quaker Meeting House in Lake Worth, Florida. This group formed The Truth Project, Inc., a Florida non-profit corporation whose purpose is to help educate high school students and their parents about military service and to give them enough accurate information to make informed choices about critical decisions. As a group we are various ages, sexes, ethnicities, creeds and political philosophies, but we are all proud Americans.

The Quakers welcomed us into their church, because they believed our intent was non-violent and was in keeping with their deeply-felt beliefs of teaching peace and understanding. They knew our purpose was solely to exercise our First Amendment Rights to assemble peacefully, speak freely, and worship as we choose.

We had no idea until one year later that the unfamiliar faces in the church had been sent by the President's Department of Defense to spy on us; NBC News investigators showed us that agents of the 902nd Military Intelligence Group from Fort Meade, MD, where the

National Security Agency is headquartered, infiltrated the Quaker Meeting House, and then filed a report designating us a CREDIBLE THREAT. The president's agents DID NOT come to worship alongside us, to help us plan our educational program, or to protect us.

And it wasn't just us. Shortly after NBC aired its report, churches and other groups began sharing their experiences of infiltration and intimidation with us. Saint Maurice's Catholic Church in Dania, the Unitarian Universalists, the Fort Lauderdale Friends, members of Pax Christi in West Palm Beach, environmental groups, and many others.

Agents rummaged through trash, attacked and snooped into email,, hacked web sites, and listened in on phone conversations. Indeed, address books and activist meeting lists have disappeared.

President Bush tells us only a few phone calls are listened to, but THAT'S NOT TRUE.

Mr. Bush says they only monitor calls to foreign countries, but THAT is ABSOLUTELY untrue.

He tells us that he spies only on known Al-Qaida contacts or affiliates, but I know for a fact that is NOT TRUE, because I was spied on in a house of worship IN THE UNITED STATES, and in private homes in Florida where I was meeting with other peaceful persons engaged in constitutionally-protected activity.

I HAVE EVERY REASON TO BELIEVE that the federal government listens to my phone calls to family members and friends about purely personal matters.

I have every reason to believe that the president's agents READ my e-mail, PHOTOGRAPH me as I exercise my Constitutional Rights, RECORD the license numbers of cars I ride in, and CREATE huge databases with information about me and my fellow activists, BECAUSE all of this specific activity is on record, from government files, as having been visited on American citizens, around the United States, by members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force, the FBI, the NSA and other agencies.

If as George Orwell once said, "In times of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act," we members of the Truth Project, Inc., must be revolutionaries. I thought Congress passed safeguards against indiscriminate domestic spying after the gross violations of citizens' rights during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam peace activism. But here we are again. Like the Church Committee. Today, I think President Bush should confess the true extent of his domestic spying program. Confession is good for the soul. I think HE should tell the truth. That truth shall set us all free.